



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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By Capt. John Callahan

**Alaska Air Guard members get to work in Australia**

*U.S. Space Command to save \$20-\$30 million by tapping Guard expertise*

**H.E. HOLT NAVAL COMMUNICATION STATION, Australia** – Thirty-four men and women of the Alaska Air National Guard's 176<sup>th</sup> Wing began work today on a space radar installation at this remote base on the far western tip of Australia.

For the next two weeks the Guard members will help prepare the facility to receive and install more than 75 tons of space-surveillance radar equipment being relocated to Holt from the Caribbean Island of Antigua. This relocation will allow the U.S. Air Force's Space Command to better track space debris and satellites in the Southern Hemisphere.

The Alaska Air Guardsmen, most drawn from the 176th Civil Engineer Squadron, are here as part of a 15-day Deployment for Training, or DFT. These types of short deployments allow the airmen to train in a broad range of skills while performing real-world work.

Initial estimates placed the total costs of the operation at \$70 million. By replacing contractors with rotating teams of Air Guard members, Space Command expects to save \$20 to \$30 million from that figure.

"It's a really innovative approach – one that could serve as a model for future projects," said Lt. Col. Jack Evans, the squadron's commander. "The Guard brings in a broad range of talent, from carpenters and electricians to structural engineers and heavy equipment operators. These men and women need to continually train to learn new skills and keep their current ones sharp, so this kind of work is something we would be doing anyway. It really is a win for everyone involved – including the taxpayer."

The first rotation of Air Guard members at Holt took place in August 2013. The Alaska contingent comprises the sixth such group to work on-site. The radar is expected to come on line in 2016.

The facility will be the first low-Earth-orbit space surveillance network sensor in the Southern Hemisphere. Once completed it will operate under the auspices of Space Command under a joint agreement with the Australian Department of Defense. The radar will be able to accurately track up to 200 objects a day, from satellites and space launches in Asia to "space junk" dropped by astronauts during space walks.

The 176 CES gives its members the opportunity to participate in a DFT once a year or so. In recent years squadron members have built a schoolhouse in Ecuador, remodeled aircraft hangars in Hawaii, renovated a Navy SEAL mountain warfare center near California's Mexican border, repaired housing at a Coast Guard air station in Puerto Rico, expanded a training facility on California's remote San Clemente Islands and built dormitories in Israel.

"It's kind of a nice reward for our members, who work hard all year round," Evans said.

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Flickr Photo Album

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/alaskanationalguard/sets/72157644150342347/>

Attached Photos:

**140506-F-NW557-008**

H.E. HOLT NAVAL COMMUNICATION STATION, Australia – Maj. Kim Riggs, construction flight chief for the Alaska Air National Guard's 176th Civil Engineer Squadron, and Maj. Chris Mercer, the squadron's infrastructures flight chief, study blueprints for the facility here May 6, 2014. The two were among thirty-four Alaska Air Guard members, most from the 176<sup>th</sup> CES, who deployed for two weeks to this tiny outpost at the far western tip of Australia to help build a space radar facility to be jointly operated by Australia and the United States. National Guard photo by Capt. John Callahan.

**140506-F-NW557-081**

H.E. HOLT NAVAL COMMUNICATION STATION, Australia – Staff Sgt. Kelli Naramore, operations manager for the Alaska Air National Guard's 176th Civil Engineer Squadron, uses an oxyacetylene torch to cut a hole in a girder here May 6, 2014. Thirty-four Alaska Air Guard members, most from the 176<sup>th</sup> CES, deployed for two weeks to this tiny outpost at the far western tip of Australia to help build a space radar facility to be jointly operated by Australia and the United States. National Guard photo by Capt. John Callahan.